

RAISING TEENAGERS – WHAT'S A PARENT TO DO

The teenage years (ages 13-19) are a time of life during which many changes occur - physical, emotional, psychological, behavioral, as well as social. It is a transition from childhood to adulthood where a young person begins to assert his or her individuality and ultimately achieves independence. This is often a trying and uneasy time for both the parent and child, especially when teenagers engage in or experiment with activities that are considered to be risky because of peer pressure or curiosity. Parents and teens often differ in their values, communication styles, and problem solving methods. Furthermore, when parents treat their teenagers like young children, conflicts usually follow. Immigrant parents may have an even more difficult time because of additional barriers created by language, educational and cultural gaps.

Depending on how well a family handles the changes that take place during the adolescent years, parents can survive this journey and maintain harmony within the home. The following suggestions can help you, as a parent, to prepare for your child's teenage years:

1. Establish a warm and loving home environment
 - Maintain a positive and consistent parent-child connection. Spend time alone with your teen and plan family time together.
 - Be considerate of the needs of each family member.
 - Express love and care for your spouse. A loving relationship between parents promotes harmony in the home.
2. Develop trust, honesty and respect
 - Never use physical or verbal abuse.
 - Don't be afraid to admit your mistakes.
3. Keep an open line of communication
 - Be a role model and set a good example.
 - Keep your promises.
 - Respect your teen's privacy, personal space, opinions, and feelings.
 - Actively listen to your teen. Hear his/her point of view, even if you disagree with them. Repeat what you have heard so there is no misunderstanding.
 - Offer constructive criticism. Criticize the behavior and not the person. Give an explanation for your dissatisfaction and find a solution to the problem together.
 - Talk to your teen. Promote conversation or discussions. Avoid lecturing or yelling.
 - Be empathetic and understanding. Put yourself in your teen's place so you can share his/her feelings.
 - Stay informed and know what influences your teen's thinking and decision making.
 - Give praise and encouragement for effort as well as success or good behavior when appropriate. Teens respond better to positive than constant negative feedback.
4. Set reasonable goals, expectations, and firm boundaries
 - Maintain fair and clear standards for grades and appropriate behavior.
 - Decide together on family rules and consequences of breaking them. Follow through on disciplinary actions.
 - Combine discipline with instruction.
 - Encourage positive behavior with emotional rather than material rewards. Examples of emotional rewards: a hug, compliment, pat on the back, etc.

5. Monitor your teen's activities and friends
 - Take a genuine interest in how your teen spends his/her time.
 - Get to know your teen's friends.
6. Encourage extracurricular activities
 - Extracurricular activities help to promote good health and the development of interpersonal and social skills.
7. Teach responsibility and independence
 - Train your teen to take responsibility for household chores and their belongings.
 - Let your teen express his/her own opinions, make his/her own decisions, solve his/her own problems, and learn to accept the consequences of his/her actions. Be ready to offer guidance and support.
8. Instill pride into your teen about his/her cultural heritage
 - Provide opportunities and stimulate interest in learning about the Chinese culture. Encourage but never force.
 - Allow your teen to decide what part of his/her heritage he/she values and appreciates.
9. Watch for warning signs of trouble
These problems may signal a need for professional help:

- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Sleep problems
- Lack of interest in activities
- Personality or mood changes
- Depression
- Dramatic changes in personal appearance and weight
- Falling grades
- Absence from school
- Drug or alcohol abuse

The teenage years can be a challenging, frustrating but also rewarding and exciting time for the parent and child. Your teen's doctor can help you deal with these challenges and assist you in finding proper resources when needed. For information on parenting workshops, family counseling and programs for Asian youth and their families, contact:

Chinatown Youth Center (CYC)
1237 Van Ness Ave., Suite 200
San Francisco, CA 94109
(415) 775-2636

Asian Family Institute
4020 Balboa St.
San Francisco, CA 94121
(415) 668-5998 ext. 101